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SUBJECT: SENEGAL'S ROLE AS MEDIATOR IN NIGER

¶1. (SBU) PolCouns met with Mamadou Ndiaye, Chief of Staff of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as well as Ambassador Mamadou Sow, senior adviser to the Foreign Minister, and Mouhamadou Sarr, head of the MFA's America and Oceania Division, to discuss Senegal's role as a mediator in Niger. Ndiaye noted that the heads of state of the member countries of the Economic Community of West Africa (ECOWAS) had selected Senegalese President Abdoulaye Wade to serve as mediator before the coup d'etat. He reported that Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Madicke Niang was en route for Niamey when the coup happened. As a result, the Foreign Minister never arrived in Niger, only getting so far as Ouagadougou. Given the new situation, Ndiaye said it was impossible to know at this time what the members of ECOWAS would decide regarding how to manage the crisis in Niger. He emphasized that Wade had been selected to mediate between a sitting president and the opposition; he was not empowered to mediate between a military junta and a deposed president. With this in mind, Ndiaye stressed that Senegal would follow the will of the African Union (AU) and ECOWAS regarding how to proceed from this point on, underscoring this point by noting that the GOS has officially condemned the attempted coup d'etat echoing the position of the AU. Ndiaye undertook to get in touch with the Embassy at some point next week to further discuss Niger and Senegal's role after the situation had become more clear. He went on to say, given that there is an American embassy in Niamey, the GOS would appreciate any information the United States could provide regarding the evolving situation in Niger.

¶2. (SBU) Poulcouns spoke with his French counterpart, Laurent Chevalier, regarding Senegal's role as a mediator. While noting that it is much too early to make any definitive judgments, Chevalier expressed doubts regarding Senegal's ability to be an effective negotiator in Niger (as opposed to Mauritania) noting that Senegal does not have the same historic ties to Niger that it has with Mauritania. That said he acknowledged that Senegal would not be acting more or less unilaterally as it did in Mauritania. Instead, Wade would be acting at the behest of and with the support of ECOWAS and ostensibly the AU and one would imagine the major donor countries, which should give him the legitimacy he would need to succeed.

¶3. (SBU) Comment: President Wade sees himself as an international statesman of the first order and lives for being put in charge of managing this type of crisis. He is a serial conflict mediator (or would-be mediator) and has told numerous interlocutors that he believes he deserves a Nobel Peace Prize. Since becoming president, Wade has mediated or attempted to get involved in the mediation of conflicts and crises in Mauritania, Guinea, a Chad/Sudan border conflict, Madagascar, Zimbabwe, the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, United States/Iran. While it is true that Wade was selected by ECOWAS to mediate between the opposition and a sitting president and not the junta and the deposed president, there is a strong probability he will use his previous assignment as a basis for a new one focused on restoring a return to constitutional order in Niger. It is important to note, given the reaction of Senegal to recent coups d'etat in Mauritania and

Guinea, that Senegal is not likely to be overly insistent on returning President Mamadou Tandja to power. Instead, the Senegalese are likely to take a practical rather than a principled approach and focus more on quickly reestablishing stability and constitutional order even if "democracy" -- in the form of democratically elected president not being returned to power -- suffers in the process. That said Wade is an agile politician who will not want to lose face or political capital to a losing proposition. If any future negotiations were to bog down, Wade is likely to quickly divest himself of ownership of the crisis. To wit, he attempted to do just that when negotiations between the presidents of Chad and Sudan began to break down during talks he mediated on the margins of the last Summit of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), which Senegal hosted in 2008. In that case, when it seemed that the talks would fail, Wade announced at the 11th hour that he had never really want to be the facilitator. United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki Moon had to stiffen Wade's spine and push him to finish what he started. Finally, assuming that Senegal is placed in the lead to help mediate a solution to the crisis in Niger, it is unclear if the Foreign Minister, Niang, will be as skilled a mediator as his predecessor Cheikh Tidiane Gadio. End comment.

SMITH